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ABSTRACT

Presented is a view of ecosocial studies as representing one instructional strategy which can be used in the classroom to develop global awareness and perspectives in elementary and secondary education students. In addition to defining the need for and scope of ecosocial studies, this document: (1) discusses the role of the social studies; (2) indicates how ecosocial studies can help correct three weaknesses in present social studies curricula; (3) presents a schema for and examples of a proactive action model; (4) outlines a sample unit of study from the Humans and Ecology Learning Program; and (5) briefly addresses preservice and inservice teacher education. (DC)

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ECOSOCIAL STUDIES: A Strategy to Develop Global Perspectives and Relationships Among Nations and Between Humans and Their Natural/ Social Environments

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Peters received his Bachelor of Science in Education (Social Studies) and Master of Education degrees from The University of Maine (Orono); pursued doctoral level studies in Social Studies Education at The Florida State University (Tallahassee); and was granted the Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum (with advanced studies in the Social Studies) from The University of Rochester (NY).

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Dr. Peters has been a Social Studies classroom teacher (grades 5-12); Social Studies department chairperson (grades 9-12); Social Studies curriculum coordinator (K-12); and supervisor of student teachers in Social Studies Education - The University of Rochester.

Dr. Peters has been actively involved in the evolution of the environmental education movement (at the public school level) since 1968.

A VIEW OF THE FUTURE

If present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically, and more vulnerable to disruption than the world we live in now. Serious stresses involving population, resources, and environment are clearly visible ahead.[1]

- The world's population will grow from 4 billion in 1975 to 6.35 billion in 2000, an increase of more than 50 percent. Ninety percent of this growth will occur in the poorest countries.

- The large existing gap between the rich and the poor nations will widen.

- Per capita food consumption in South Asia, the Middle East, and the lesser developed countries of Africa will scarcely improve or will actually decline below present inadequate levels. Food prices will double.

- Arable land will increase only 4 percent by 2000.

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1 Reference to The Global 2000 Report to the President, Council On Environmental Quality, Washington, DC (1980)

- During the 1990s, world oil production will approach maximum production capacity. Also, needs for fuelwood will exceed available supplies by about 25 percent before the turn of the century.

- Regional water shortages will become more severe. In many lesser developed countries water supplies will become increasingly erratic by 2000 as a result of extensive deforestation.

- The world's forests are now disappearing at the rate of 18 - 20 million hectares a year; an area half the size of California.

- Serious deterioration of agricultural soils will occur worldwide. Already, an area of cropland and grassland approximately the size of Maine is becoming barren wasteland each year.

- Extinctions of plant and animal species will increase dramatically. Hundreds of thousands of species - perhaps as many as 20 percent of all species on Earth - will be irretrievably lost as their habitats vanish, especially in tropical forests.

WE live in a world that is increasingly anarchical, unpredictable, and not of American choosing or of America's imagination.[2]

The traditional view of the world as being made up of separate pieces of real estate; nations with little contact except in times of war or through trade, is being replaced with a focus on the role of the individual in a world system; a global society if you will. Competent citizenship in today's world requires that individuals see themselves and the groups they are members of as participants (or actors) in an interrelated world or a global society. In this context, a global perspective is defined as a self-conscious awareness of one's involvement in the global society, and a set of attitudinal/social skills that enable individuals to take effective and responsible action -- as individuals and as members of groups.

Thus, global education involves knowledge, acceptance and appreciation of diverse cultures, understanding the technological developments that are shrinking time and space, and learning to analyze and to participate in efforts to solve problems and

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[2] Reference to Philip B. Secor, President, Cornell College (Iowa) (1980)

issues which threaten humankind - pollution, poverty, resource depletion, hunger, violence, and war.[3]

WHY GLOBAL EDUCATION?

In order to minimize or eradicate potential world problems by the year 2000, there is a need - now - to develop in students an understanding and appreciation of the whole of humankind as one rather than learning to appreciate 'others' -- other nations, other cultures, and other people.

Each of us shares our home; Planet Earth, with many other people as well as the diverse creations of nature. While billions of us share Earth's limited life space, and have many needs and wants in common, we do not all see the world the same way. Our senses pick up information from surrounding environments, and we use this information to try to understand the world. Using information from the environment makes it possible to think. This then is the main goal of the ecosocial studies concept; to expose the individual to knowledge, experiences (direct and vicarious), and skills which will provide the conceptual reference basis for critical thinking, decision-making, and affirmative action. To

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[3] Reference to James M. Becker, Schooling For A Global Age, McGraw-Hill (1979) as quoted in "World Studies Center Bulletin", Center for World Studies at Eisenhower College of Rochester Institute of Technology, Seneca Falls, New York (February 1981).

be a reactionary person is to be manipulated by external forces to the degree that the individual reacts to stimuli as a last resort. To be a proactive person means that the individual is assertive and determined to achieve clearly defined goals as well as follow clearly charted courses of action. The proactive person displays the qualities of leadership and the essence of good citizenship needed in the global age.

The world is changing faster than most of us can comprehend, and each of us is caught up in this change whether we know it or not -- whether we want to be or not!

The Role of the Social Studies. The social studies include many disciplines of knowledge which help the individual learn about other people (e.g., anthropology, history, geography, economics, political science, and sociology) as well as himself/herself (e.g., sociology and psychology).

- Anthropology: the study of how people live in groups, their languages, and technologies; the ways human beings behave in many different parts of the world at many different times throughout history.

- History: the story of the past and the impact of events on human lives.

- Geography: the study of the Earth's surface, its resources, and how people use these resources. It is also a study of how the environment affects the way people live and how people affect the environment.

- Economics: the study of decision-making processes regarding choices about using resources.

- Political Science: the study of politics, power, and government.

- Sociology: the study of people's behavior in groups; the relationship(s) between people in groups, today.

. Psychology: the study of how the individual's mind together with the body works to produce thoughts and actions.

WHAT ARE ECOSOCIAL STUDIES?

'Ecosocial' is derived from the words ecology and social and means the relationship(s) among/between humans as well as those relationships between humans and their environment(s).

As applied to social studies curricula in America's public schools, ecosocial studies pertain to the infusion of both environmental and global education into the several social studies disciplines of knowledge, e.g., anthropology, geography, economics, political science, and sociology.

By combining the content/materials/skills of environmental education, global education, and the social studies together into a learning/teaching strategy, ecosocial studies address themselves directly to current weaknesses in most social studies curricula - as identified by Morrissett, Hawke, and Superka.[4]

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4 Reference to Irving Morrissett, Sharryl Hawke, and Douglas Superka, "Six Problems for Social Studies in the 1980s," Social Education, National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, DC (November-December 1980).

Data from three National Science Foundation studies (Weiss 1978; Wiley 1977; Stake and Easley 1978) and from other research literature on the current state of social studies led Morrissett and others to state that:

- too many students fail to learn important social studies knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

- instruction in social studies is generally characterized by lack of variety in teaching methods and limited kinds of learning experiences.

- present social studies curricula do not contribute as much as they could to learning that is useful for helping students understand and participate more effectively in the current and future social world.

The ecosocial studies approach views the world as a learning laboratory; an environment in which students (and people of all ages and backgrounds) develop perceptual awareness of human/human relationships, global interdependence of nations, and human interaction with nature as well as diverse natural and social (human-made) environments.

Ecosocial studies curricula emphasize student acquisition of social studies knowledge and skills and the formation of global perspective attitudes. Through planned activities and learning experiences students learn to become proactive; to critically analyze data, to formulate hypotheses, to make critical decisions, and to evaluate the results of their actions. In this regard, the ecosocial studies (ES) approach employes the use of several proactive action models.

Projection: Students gather as much data about a topic as they can. Data is analyzed and conclusions are made based upon the data at hand.

Decision Tree: This author refers to this approach as the "Now/Then Critical Thinking" model. Data is collected about a topic and analyzed. Based upon the data, students choose YES/NO answers to questions about decisions to be made both in the present (NOW) and the future (THEN).

Cross-Impact Matrix: Students select topics, collect data, and think about how one thing influences other things in the present (NOW).

Scenario: Data is collected about selected topics (for example, human population figures) and analyzed. Descriptions of life in the future (...if this (NOW) ... then that (THEN)) are made based upon what is known about current trends.

The ES approach also addresses itself directly to the second weakness of contemporary social studies curricula (as noted by Morrissett and others); namely, lack of variety in teaching methods and limited kinds of learning experiences.

Because the world is perceived (by ES) as a learning laboratory, community resources; both people and places, are directly related to/infused into the on-going processes of knowledge acquisition, skills development/application, and attitudes development/values clarification as well as critical thinking and decision-making. There exists a 'mix' of teacher-directed and student-directed learning going on both in the classroom and within selected natural/social environments - local and distant. A variety of instructional materials and strategies are employed -- for purposes of affecting student awareness and perceptions. Audiovisual materials play an important exposure role in the ES approach. As noted by Bryan,[5] films can

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[5] Reference to Sam Bryan, "Effective Use of Films in Social Studies Classrooms," How To Do It Series, National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, DC (1977)

contribute to the student's understanding of the world of human experience and values, and expose students to the various areas and people of the world.

Regarding the third weakness of social studies curricula (as discussed by Morrissett and others); namely, not contributing to the student's understanding of the current and future social worlds, the ES approach does emphasize both those aspects of environmental education and global education which relate to cultures, human populations, natural resources, environmental degradation, current events, land use, international politics, and international cooperation among nations.

Thus, it would appear that the ecosocial studies approach would be a way by which social studies curricula could be upgraded to meet the needs of students and to provide a basis for global inquiry.

The National Council for the Social Studies' global education position statement (1981) notes that the phenomenon of globalization is evident in a variety of ways, including:

- the evolution of global systems of communication and transportation;
- the incorporation of local, regional, and national

economies in a world-wide global economy;

- increased interaction between societies, resulting in a global culture which exists along with an array of distinctive local, regional, and national cultures;

- the emergence of a world-wide international system which is eroding the traditional boundries between domestic and international politics;

- the increasing impact of human activity upon the planet's ecosystem and the increasing constraints on human activity imposed by the limits of the system;

- an expanding global consciousness which enhances awareness of our identities as members of the human species, as inhabitants of the planet Earth, and as participants in a global system.

NCSS goes on to state that the social studies should assume a major role in providing students with opportunities (1) to learn to perceive and understand the world as a global system, and (2) to see themselves as participants in that system, recognizing the benefits, costs, rights, and responsibilities inherent in such participation. To become a more effective agent of citizenship education in a global age, the social studies need to continue efforts to globalize the curriculum.

Ecosocial studies provides students with opportunities to learn to perceive and understand the world as a global system, and to see themselves as participants in that system. ES is currently globalizing the social studies curriculum and is an effective agent of citizenship education in a global age!

Writing in "How To Teach About Human Beings and Their Environment",[6] this author stated: environmental education should attempt to develop and affect the individual's attitudes about and concern for the state of the environment. This goal can best be accomplished by student inquiry into problems of the natural, physical environment as well as problems of human-made environments. Only by studying both 'worlds' can students logically perceive similarities and differences -- leading to interrelationships and interdependence. The ecosocial studies approach accomplishes this 'goal' by fusing together those elements of environmental education/global education/social studies which pertain to the topic of discussion. Also, the ES approach places a responsibility upon the student to become an active participant in his/her personal learning process. To be effective, ES needs proactive students; students who will actively and aggressively participate in not only their own learning but also in the planning and development of learning experiences for the entire class.

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[6] Reference to Richard Peters, "How To Teach About Human Beings and Their Environment," How To Do It Series, National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, DC (1976).

HELP: The Practical Application of the Ecosocial Studies Approach in the Classroom

HELP; a euphemism for Humans and Ecology Learning Program within the context of the Ecosocial Studies concept of instruction, is a proactive learning strategy which enables students to learn social studies skills and then to apply them in environmental/global education oriented activities. Each student becomes an active learner and role plays a social scientist -- as lessons are developed and stated goals and objectives; essential student outcomes and performance indicators, are achieved.

SAMPLE UNIT

AREA OF STUDY: Sensory Awareness of Environments

CONCEPT(S): The nature of the individual's surroundings, and how living things respond to their environments.

PURPOSE(S): To acquaint students with the nature of the natural/social environments around them as well as different geographic regions of the world, and how living things adapt to the life space.

GRADE RANGE: 1 - 12

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1) Students visit the community/school libraries and select books dealing with natural/social environments. Book reports (oral/written) can be developed.

2) Films, filmstrips, slides, and video tapes are screened in the classroom for purposes of student exposure to diverse (global) natural/social environments. Selected audiovisual materials include:

   The Face of the Earth
   Regions of the Earth
   Living in Different Places
   The Desert: An Example of Adaptation

3) Using maps and globes, students locate selected countries. Books are read which discuss the selected countries in detail. Reports can be developed.

4) Students draw outline maps of the world and locate different regions on them. Maps can be used for a bulletin board display.

5) Tourists who have visited foreign countries visit the classroom and discuss their impressions and experiences with the students.

6) Tours are taken into surrounding natural/social environments for purposes of observing characteristics. Films or video tapes can be made and screened in the classroom with future lessons/activities.

7) Students make bulletin board displays re different natural/social environments throughout the world.

8) Students conduct comparative studies involving selected regions of the United States and selected foreign countries. The task is to identify similarities/differences re geographical features, resources, population distribution and density, land use, etc.

9) A geographical area (in the local community) is selected and students conduct two separate field studies;

. an archeological dig to discover evidence of past settlements.

. a geological survey for minerals and to determine what nature's effects have been on the land.

In both these instances, students role play social scientists and apply learned skills to the field study activities.

EVALUATION:

1) Classroom activities (group work, bulletin boards, displays, etc)

2) Discussions

3) Questions asked guest speakers and general discussions

4) Reports (oral/written/visual)

5) Field study activities

6) Group activities and individual involvement/responsibility

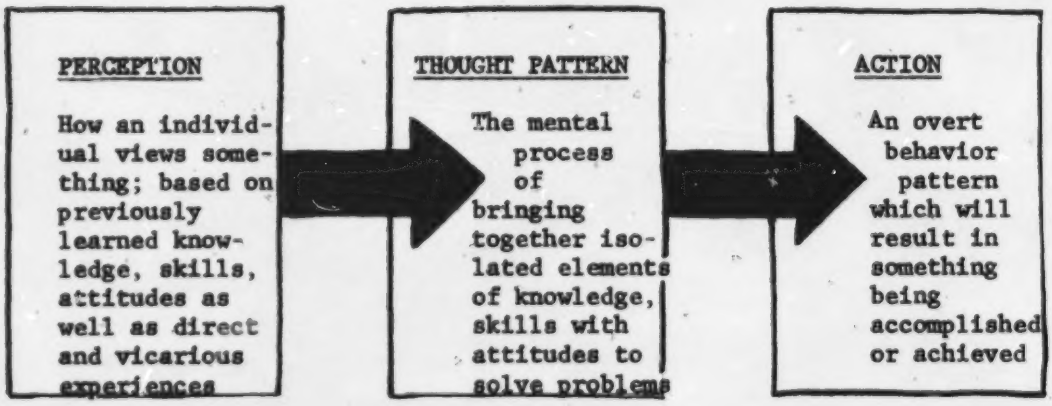
7) Tests/quizzes

8) Student logs and stories based upon activities involved in.

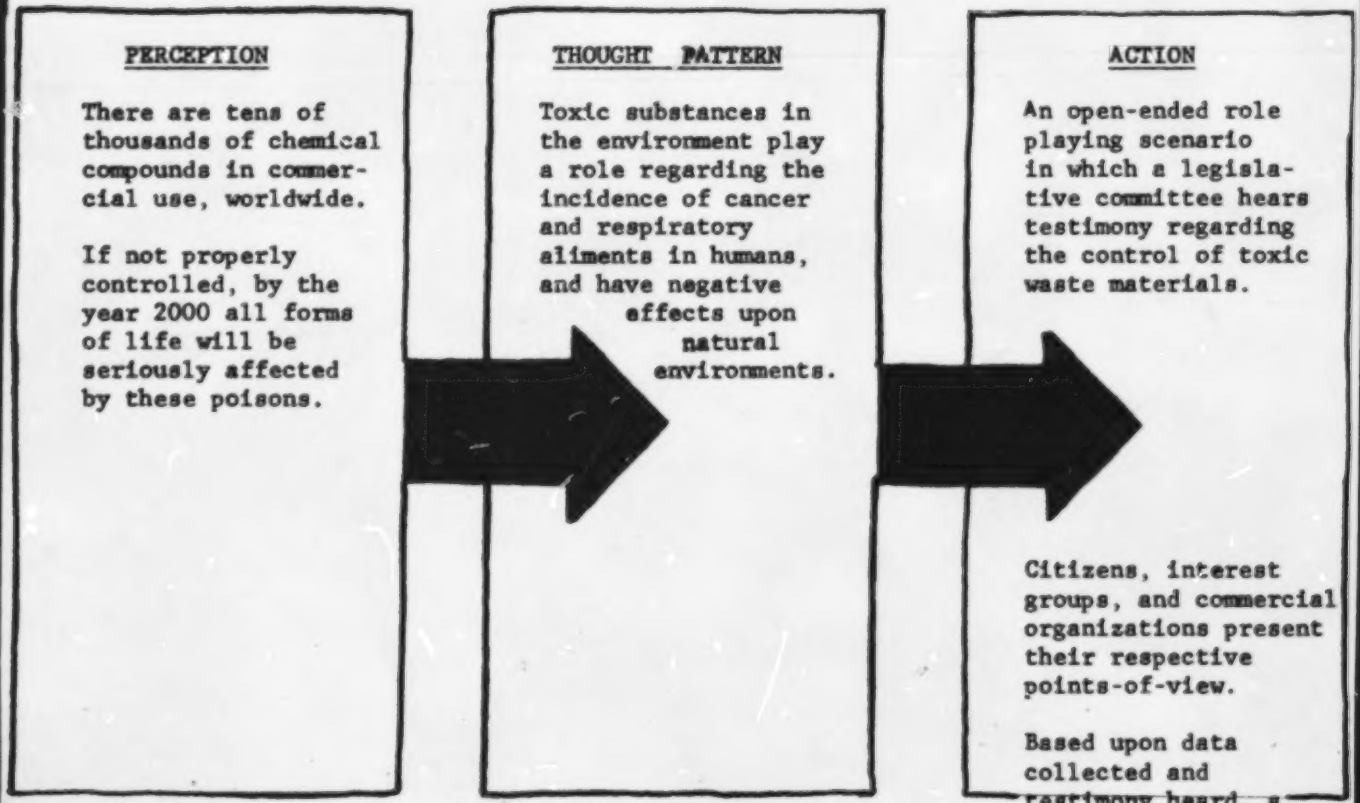
One element of HELP is student involvement with the proactive action model.

The intent and purpose of the proactive action model (PAM) is to develop the individual student's critical thinking and decision-making skills, and to provide an opportunity for the application of these skills in both real-life and hypothetical (scenario) situations.

The concept of a proactive action model would be best associated, in the field of psychology, with the homeostasis view of human beings. According to this school of thought, human beings are individuals who use knowledge and reason to direct their actions.


PERCEPTION
How an individual views something; based on previously learned knowledge, skills, attitudes as well as direct and vicarious experiences
THOUGHT PATTERN
The mental process of bringing together isolated elements of knowledge, skills with attitudes to solve problems
ACTION
An overt behavior pattern which will result in something being accomplished or achieved

PROACTIVE ACTION MODEL


PERCEPTION
There are tens of thousands of chemical compounds in commercial use, worldwide.
If not properly controlled, by the year 2000 all forms of life will be seriously affected by these poisons.
THOUGHT PATTERN
Toxic substances in the environment play a role regarding the incidence of cancer and respiratory aliments in humans, and have negative effects upon natural environments.
ACTION
An open-ended role playing scenario in which a legislative committee hears testimony regarding the control of toxic waste materials.
Citizens, interest groups, and commercial organizations present their respective points-of-view.
Based upon data collected and testimony heard, a policy decision is made by the committee.

In order to initiate and implement the proactive student oriented ecosocial studies approach to global awareness and concept development in the classroom, there is a need for both preservice (teacher trainee) and inservice teacher education.

Jan L. Tucker[7] spoke to this point when he stated that staff development and teacher education in global education should be conceived as a broad change process. A change process, in the opinion of this author, which involves change in (1) a community's perception of what formal education should be, and which clearly stated goals and objectives the school(s) should strive to achieve, (2) curricula -- with an emphasis on global studies and world view perspectives, (3) teacher perceptions of what the social studies should be and how to achieve desired changes, and (4) the role(s) students play in their own education as well as their training and skills development in critical thinking and decision-making; progressing along a citizenship growth/responsibility continuum from reactive response (externally induced) to proactive response (internally initiated aggression).

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7 Reference to Jan L. Tucker, Director, Center for International Education, Florida International University (1980) .

CONCLUSION

If present human practices and trends continue re the use/misuse of Planet Earth, serious stresses on our global ecosystem most definitely will occur.

As a nation and as a people, we must begin - now - to perceive the relationship of the United States to other countries (and their people) within the context of a global community of interdependent nations.

Global citizenship is a necessary quality, and world-wide (cooperative) efforts are a must in order to remedy existing global ills and to prevent the gloomy future for all of Earth's inhabitants- as forecast in The Global 2000 Report to the President .

The Ecosocial Studies approach is one instructional strategy which can be introduced into the classroom, now, for purposes of affecting the global awareness and perspectives of students; K - 12. ES is a strategy which infuses elements of environmental education/global education into the social studies disciplines for purposes of affecting knowledge/skills acquisition/application and citizenship growth, e.g., analysis of data researched, critical thinking, and decision-making.

ES strives to produce proactive citizens (of the nation and the world) by providing opportunities for students to learn, apply, and evaluate -- within real-world and vicarious situations.

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